

From Knowledge to Conservation: How to Establish the Field Art Brut

This talk will explore the processes of recognition of Art Brut – mainly translated as “outsider art” in English language countries – as a field of research and a notion, since the investigations initiated by the artist and collector Jean Dubuffet in France and Switzerland in 1945. We will follow the history of his undertakings, until he decided to put these exceptional artworks in a museum called the Collection de L’Art Brut in Lausanne in 1972 – today the seminal museum in the field. Beyond the interest shown by many professional artist/writers since the 19th century and internationally well-known curators like Jean-Hubert Martin (*Magiciens de la Terre*, *Moscow Biennial*, etc.), we know the initiatives of Dubuffet were unique in the way they were based on a substantial collection, which opened up a field of knowledge, documented and accessible to the public.

The art critical progress of Art Brut, contrary to other expressions related to self-taught art, has undergone fertile development. This study will bring us to identify, by comparison, the difficulties associated with the institutionalization of “folk art” and the ambiguity of terms in this art continuum. We will see that the challenges of conservation and preservation in this field are among the key elements affecting the historical value of this rich material, and note their marginalization in university art history departments. To understand this issue, we will present three typical examples: the curatorial premises behind the exhibitions of Harald Szeemann, an examination of “folk art environments,” and the motivation that guided Dubuffet’s philosophy.

This lecture will give an overview of specific obstacles related to self-taught art, notably with regard to its recognition by the art world, by pointing to the uniqueness of these artworks.

Biography

Art historian and independant curator, Valérie Rousseau is specialized in art brut, folk art and other outsider and marginal practices. Currently a publications director at the Andrew Edlin Gallery (New York) and a former director of the Société des arts indisciplinés (Montreal), she has been involved in several studies, symposia, publications (*Culture & Musées; Vestiges de l’indiscipline: Environnements d’art et anarchitectures*) and exhibitions (*Collectors of Skies; Henry Darger; Richard Greaves; Bill Anhang; Chassé-Croisé: Art populaire et art indiscipliné*) in Canada, the USA and Europe in the fields of art, museum studies, heritage and anthropology. She is an affiliated researcher with the Laboratory of Anthropology and History of the Cultural Institution (LAHIC, Paris). Holding a Masters degree in Cultural Anthropology (EHESS, Paris) and a Masters degree in Art Theory (UQAM), she is currently completing a Ph.D in Art History.